

Sex, death, Gilgamesh, and the birth of consciousness



*Starting with sex and ending with death...
thus bracketed, time to contemplate the interval.*

– Bianco Luno

He Who Saw the Deep...

– The Epic of Gilgamesh

...we should simply aim to spend more time in graveyards.

– Heidegger, when asked how we might recover authenticity

We tell stories to understand.¹

1. In science, an hypothesis, a theory, a natural law... are stories with varying degrees of conviction attached to them, but all attempt to organize experience at the edge of our senses with an effort to make sense of it. “Making sense” of things is about organizing them so they serve some project of ours, the basic one being *survival*. And beyond that, a more luxuriously one is to *flourish*. In the case of science, in the service of technology, stories with enough precision prepare for us for acting on the environment toward those same ends. (We note that the “truth” of a story is less relevant than we might think. If the truth (in the sense of the correct picture of the lie of things independent of our agenda) were crucial to our stories, we would be hopeless. Perhaps we *are* in a hopeless situation... But the fact we are *still* here shows just how inessential truth – as opposed to fruitful suspicion – is for us. We are this far along because we suspect many things, and *so far* these have by and

In literature, we tell stories to understand ourselves and our context. In the Western world, the oldest surviving story is the *Epic of Gilgamesh* from some 5000-5500 years ago. That it can still move us after all this time is testimony to its enduring power. It can do this because it connects sex, love, friendship, triumph, hubris, loss, grief, violence, and death² – and, by making the connection between these, documents *the origin of consciousness* itself: the point we learned how and when we stopped being merely animals but discovered we were not gods either. We learn by eliminating those possibilities, calling what remains “human.” The consciousness meant here is not mere *access* consciousness – the kind we share with animals, the kind that informs us of what there is around us that may help or hurt us – but *reflective* consciousness: an awareness that we are here – *at all*, wondering *why* ourselves, *why* we do things, *why* things happen to us, *why* anything... Philosophy got started with this kind of consciousness. So if the *Epic* can tell us something about the origin of reflective awareness, it is philosophically relevant.

It is also a beautiful story, told in language of great expressive power. It dates from near the beginning of the invention of non-plastic art and culture. For centuries, its stories circulated orally before being pinned down in cuneiform, a form of writing that was originally devised to record business dealings, but blossomed into what eventually became the vehicle for what truly separated us from the natural world, but without firmly placing us in any other world.

We can *guess* something about the contents of the mind that creates a stone implement or edifice, but we are *told* in literature expressly, in stories. We still have the task of *interpreting* what we are told, a task that further exercises our imagination and deepens self-understanding.

Why heaven is empty

Perhaps, the most important bit of wisdom Gilgamesh has to learn the hard way – and not one we would find any easier – is that being good *requires* mortality. The gods send a challenge to humble the brutal, arrogant, Gilgamesh – convinced, as he is, of his invincibility – in the form of Enkidu: first as rival, then as dear friend, grief at whose loss eventually leads Gilgamesh to come to terms, after many trials, after his illusions are stripped away, with the notion that the only immortality he will ever have lies in how he will be remembered after his death. He learns responsibility through reflection on this. Thus, *eternal life is shown incompatible with ethics*. Reflection on his finitude is what ultimately redeems Gilgamesh and makes him into an enlightened, because *acknowledged* mortal, despot.

Corollary: the gods are not good, they are the embodiments of fickleness they are because – *what may you threaten immortality with?* As such, they will never be forgotten because they will always be around. But woe to those who will not be. They have only the memory those who survive them will bother to have of them, and only for as long. It is to these you must suck up. This change in the direction of spiritual propitiation is a singular mark of moral development consequent on the irrelevance of gods. It is, ultimately, the fallout of reflective consciousness. The gods are real, but have nothing to offer us.

large worked to secure our place – *not* because we know them. We will reserve the term “knowledge” for a suspicion that dead-ends at a theoretical point immune to augmentation or correction.)

2. Adventure, of course, too. It’s got it all.

Resources

Introductions

“[The First Known Story Ever Written | analysing the Epic of Gilgamesh.](#)” Archaeologist Fig Tree retells the Gilgamesh story. Her lively hour-long presentation is an excellent introduction for those new to the story.

“[The Series of Gilgamesh | A Philosophical Introduction](#)” presented by Mathias Warnes is a more ambitious survey and analysis of the epic. The three-hour tour goes deep into its cultural significance. It touches on how the self was first constructed. How trauma makes us human, how, though animals *perish*, only humans *die*. How the universe, once crawling with gods, is now bereft of them... how this and much more first dawned on us.

Translations into English

These are freely available and there are many more translations, all incomplete because new material is still being discovered. Some are more scholarly, and some are more readable and poetic, though loose, renderings.

Nancy K. Sandars (1960)
Spelling and error correction by John Paulose
<http://www.aina.org/books/eog/eog.pdf>

Maureen Gallery Kovacs (1998)
Electronic Edition by Wolf Carnahan
<http://www.ancienttexts.org/library/mesopotamian/gilgamesh/tab1.htm>

Andrew George (1999)
<https://content.cosmos.art/media/pages/library/the-epic-of-gilgamesh/8cc34b563d-1598904500/gilgamesh.pdf>

About the Epic

“[Death in Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time*](#),” Mark A. Menaldo. Examines Heidegger’s thinking on death and the catalyzing role it plays in the development of reflective consciousness and authenticity. Though not mentioned, the ancient *Epic* illuminates Heidegger’s point. (Menaldo’s piece is also remarkable for its lucid presentation of Heidegger’s sometimes obscure work.)

“[Political Philosophy in the Epic of Gilgamesh](#),” Alexander van Eijk. “What I want to do in this paper is introduce one work from antiquity, the Epic of Gilgamesh, into the canon of political philosophy. It is the oldest piece of literature we know, first written around 1800 BC and touches on all manner of issues from government, to sexuality, to mourning and to human nature. As will hopefully become clear

throughout this investigation, the *Epic* is a veritable treasure trove of interesting ideas and the canon of political philosophy could be much enriched by its continued scholarship.”

For those interested in the Heidegger connection with this theme, I recommend this short, very accessible, [podcast by Stephen West](#).

In connection with our discussion of the significance of the life that persists after ours is over, I mentioned the book *Afterlife* by Samuel Scheffler. Here's a short [summary of the main argument in the book by David Egan](#).

Appendix: relevant passages from [Menaldo on Heidegger and death](#)

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger advances the idea that authentic being toward death enables the person to experience genuine freedom and resolve. In other words, if human beings want to understand what an authentic human life is, each individual must grapple with their finitude. Making meaning out of death is how one understands life.

...

the inevitable awareness that time is bound to mortality.

...

the radical aloneness of her existence.

...

The person's experience is effortless, so to speak, because the caring for things always comes first. All the things that surround her are meaningful, so her world is lit up with significance. Experience in the world of beings is not a series of isolated events, powered by her cognitive discovery of finite objects.... Her choices and getting along in the world are tied to a pre-existing web of meaning and ends (for the sake of) that she is continuously advancing toward....

...

Heidegger's structure of time works the way it does, because the person is projecting themselves into a finite horizon defined by death. The person is a being-toward-death. Non-human animals are not temporal, as far as we know, because they do not anticipate their own deaths.

...

She cannot help but see her everyday world as a busy garden that needs tending, but this does not allow her to truly individuate herself. This problem is compounded by what Heidegger calls falling prey,

which is the tendency to fall back on the conventional meanings of the world. The person falls prey by interpreting herself through her public, they-self¹² which denies the person her proper individuation.

...

Individuation is only possible by properly understanding her being-toward-death.

...

As a temporal being that is running ahead of itself, it is a challenge to see the person as a whole, since wholeness implies a finished quality.

...

As long as the person is, she is a being that is ahead-of-itself, which always leaves something outstanding. By outstanding, Heidegger means that which is continually in a state of what it will be. The person persists in this state of “fragmentariness,” which can only end in death.¹³ If death marks the point where fragmentariness ends, Heidegger asks if the person can experience this end? He rejects the idea. The person is not adequately equipped to experience death as an end because death is the loss of the being that the person is (Dasein, understood as literally being-there).

Heidegger then wonders if a person is able to experience death vicariously: through the death of others. Perhaps, Heidegger speculates, in the death of someone else, the person gets close to the experience of death, by dealing with the death of others as suffering and loss. Yet Heidegger is quick to point out that the person can never experience the death of others in a genuine sense.¹⁴ Since no one can die for another in their place, ultimately, “every Dasein must itself actually take dying upon itself.”

...

Death is the relational possibility unlike any other. It is an extreme “not yet;” so, as something that can never be actualized it is exceedingly nonrelational.

...

It is easier to evade this truth because she is busied by things in the world and is invested in her identity (Dasein’s public self). This state of inauthenticity is neither lamentable nor blameworthy; it is just how the person finds herself.

...

For example, Heidegger thinks of boredom as an especially helpful mood. It is not boredom for this one thing or activity, but a profound and fundamental boredom, in which the relational nexus seems to melt away. This mood is vital in experiencing time and the world differently as it awakens the person from her inauthentic slumbering through the world.¹⁷ Whereas cognition is both partial and short-lived, Heidegger’s great insight regarding moods is that the person is perennially in and out of moods. If attuned appropriately to mood, she gets nearer to a primordial and authentic understanding.

...

Disclosure reveals the person as thrown-ness, which means that she is merely cast into the world that is going to be familiar and significant to her, and also be the reason for her absorption in everydayness. She is always concerned with the nearest thing, and, as a result, **does not take notice of her thrownness. [Which the mood of boredom may facilitate.]**

...

Thus, **anxiety** interrupts her very being, demonstrates her facticity to her self, and may attune her to the truth that she is a being-toward-the-end. **Anxiety clears a path for her authentic understanding.**

...

the **public** interpretation of death.

...

As an **abstraction**, the person understands that one dies or people die. Yet, this understanding is always **distant and peripheral** because **it happens to someone else**, “to a stranger or a neighbor.”²⁰ Death counts, fatality rates, and lifespans distort the phenomenon and encourage the notion that death belongs to no one. In truth, death is the person’s ownmost potentiality of being.²¹

Next, the person misinterprets death as an end, particularly as an event. When she worries out loud that “I am going to die,” she is interpreting death as something that will happen to her. **However, death never occurs to the person because she cannot participate in such an event. Death itself is closed off to the person who dies, so she cannot be present (or represented) in her own death.**²²

Since the person is separated from the experience of her own death, as long as the person exists, there appears to be **something outstanding in her being**. Heidegger observes that death marks a change to no-longer-being-there, and what is outstanding is liquidated, while **the representable character of the person is dissolved**.²³ This liquidation presents a paradox, because Heidegger began his analysis with a view to wholeness; death, however, does not provide wholeness. **It just ends what is outstanding. Death, therefore, must mean something within the person’s outstanding character.** Heidegger articulates this added significance as a question: **is human existence (Dasein), “always already its not-yet?”**²⁴ To clarify the meaning of outstandingness, Heidegger offers an analogy to ripening fruit. When a fruit is ripening it possesses two simultaneous characteristics. At each stage of ripening, the fruit is both its ripeness and unripeness. In Heideggerian form, we would say that the un-ripe fruit contains its not-yet. The potential for what the fruit is and can be is contained solely in the fruit. The fruit achieves its fullness in peak ripeness, and, so to speak, it fulfils itself. **Like the fruit, the person also contains her not-yet in her being. She moves through a steady stream of lived possibilities, but she always contains the seed of her ownmost possibility. She is in life and toward death. Unlike the fruit, the person never**

reaches fulfillment or a finished state in death.²⁵ Death is not the person's *telos* (final end) because it is neither a state the person can enter into or something that becomes present to her.

...

But Heidegger argues that dying and death are not the same.

...

These three misunderstandings – death as a distant or abstract possibility, death as static, and death as an event – point to the power of the inauthentic mode of death. The public evades and veils death by comforting the dying about the prospect of everything returning to normal, as if dying was a social nuisance.

...

Anticipation permeates her atmosphere; it affects her and changes her disposition. Instead of neglecting anticipation, she chooses to listen. In anticipation of death, she stands in an openness to her primordial disclosure as a being-toward-death. In other words, she lays herself open to this fact of existence, during her whole life she is with death. Once she anticipates death, she is now free and capable of grasping death as death, and no longer does she try to outrun or evade death.

...

Authenticity is not a monkish disengagement, according to Heidegger, as the person never ceases being-in-the-world and moving through her lived possibilities. It is a modified engagement, as she is “torn away from the they,” which is the first time the person feels a sense of lostness, confusion, and insecurity about her identity. She realizes that her ownmost self and public they-self are misfit.³⁷ Lostness is the precondition for the person's becoming free; since death is unavoidable, freedom from the fear of death enables a vivid grasp of existence. At the same time, she has no familiarity with her own non-existence, since non-existence is a non-relational possibility. Death is the one thing that holds the person existentially together, since she shares her own death with no one else. Yet, nothing in her experience can aid her understanding of no longer being here. Therefore, according to Heidegger there can be no philosophizing about death nor a learning to die. Death radically individualizes the person, and it opens up the person for possibilities that are not in everydayness, fallen-prey, or ossified roles of the public they-self.

...

Authentic Death and the Political

In what way can the person in an authentic mode return to community and live with others? Heidegger never speaks of politics proper, but he intimates his views in other works. Namely, in the *Introduction to Metaphysics* he speaks of an “authentic happening in the history of a people.”⁴⁰ This book, which he produced from a series of lectures delivered in 1935, is especially troublesome in Heidegger's corpus, since it is here that he speaks of “the inner truth and greatness of National

Socialism.”⁴¹ In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger casts the German people as the torch bearers of authentic history. It seems that the radical individuation of authentic being toward death can be experienced as a collectivity.

[Dying is not a social event. Death is not an “event” at all. It is outside of time. No need to prepare for it. It is the end of all preparation, says Heidegger. First comes birth, or, more precisely, consciousness of it, then comes that which falls within the range of care, then death.]

But though Heidegger is correct about the existential journey for individuals – collectives, communities, associations, corporate entities, tribes, groups of any sort, let alone, peoples or nations (e.g. the German, or any, people) are essentially inauthentic. Politics cannot be moral for this reason. Adiaphorous, at best, and that rarely. These may become extinct, like a species, but they do not die. Birth and death are not public events. You do one, as the other, alone. Heidegger slipped too easily from individual into “theyness-conditioned” thinking...]

Appendix 2: *post coitum triste* and Gilgamesh

My research notes from the late 1990s on the phrase *post coitum triste*. *Gilgamesh* has been stewing in me for at least three decades.

From dlupher@ups.edu Thu Mar 26 10:42:40 1998
Date: Thu, 26 Mar 1998 10:44:04 -0800
To: classics@u.washington.edu
From: dlupher@ups.edu (David Lupher)
Subject: Re: Request [quasi-salacious]

James Baron passed along a query from a colleague in medieval French literature who had asked:

Greetings from France. I should like to ask your help in identifying the source (author and, if possible, precise reference) of a Latin phrase: *Post coitum animal triste*.

This was in fact the subject of a pretty extensive thread on this list in early May of 1997. The initiator of the thread was yours truly, but like Jim Baron I was acting as front man for someone else. At the same time I submitted the same query to FICINO, a Ren./Ref. list. I'll attempt to summarize briefly what emerged. (By the way, did not a French (?) movie with the title “Post Coitum” just open in New York?)

- To cut to the chase, there is no author to whom the exact phrase cited above can be attributed with confidence. It is apparently post-classical, but it has classical antecedents, as we shall see.

- The mot often appears in the expanded form “*post coitum animal triste praeter gallum mulieremque*.”

- The only actual piece of scholarship which those of us rooting about here were able to turn up was a short note by Justin Glenn of Florida State Univ., “Omne Animal Post Coitum Triste: A Note and a Query,” in “American Notes and Queries” 21 (1982): 49-51. I wouldn’t mind hearing of other studies if anyone on the list happens to have come across one (or written one!). Glenn focused mainly on the modern career of the phrase. He noted that it has achieved its present renown through having been cited by Freud, who claimed that “this quotation has not been traced”; Havelock Ellis, who referred to it as anonymous; and Alfred C. Kinsey, who attributed it to Galen. Glenn inconclusively concluded, largely on the basis of the Kinsey passage, that “it is entirely possible...that this quotation is derived ultimately from Galen, but this has yet to be confirmed.”

- I couldn’t find anything in what little Galen I could survey (more Loeb Galens, PLEASE!), nor did anyone on Classics or FICINO supply a Galenic passage.

- Glenn also cited Pseudo-Aristotle “Problems” Bk 4, 877b on the intriguing question, “Why do young men, when first they begin to have sexual intercourse, hate those with whom they have associated when the act is over?” He also cited Pliny, Hist. Nat. 10.83.171: “*homini tantum primi coitus paenitentia, augurium scilicet vitae a paenitenda origine*” “Man is the only animal whose first experience of mating is accompanied by regret; this is indeed an augury for a life derived from a regrettable origin.” But it will be noted that both of these passages refer to negative feelings after one’s *first* act of intercourse. Neither implies that such feelings recur after subsequent acts. Also, the Pliny passage specifically limits this “*paenitentia*” to human beings – no “*omne animal*” here!

- PETER GREEN wrote: “The latest edition of the ODQ flatly says ‘post- classical’ and leaves it at that. But the notion is surely very close to the hendecasyllables ascribed to Petronius: *Foeda est in coitu et brevis voluptas Et taedet Veneris statim peractae.*” I wonder if this was one of the lamented PMG’s “salacious” postings? In passing, I’d recommend Ben Jonson’s translation of the Petronius. It begins “Doing a filthy pleasure is, and short; / And done, we straight repent us of the sport...”

- BRIAN OGILVIE wrote: “The closest approximation to this sentiment of which I am aware is Aristotle, *De generatione animalium* 1.18, 725b5, b15, talking about the nature of semen as a very potent residue:

“For the exhaustion consequent on the loss of even a very little of the semen is conspicuous because the body is deprived of the ultimate gain drawn from the nutriment”; “But still in most men and as a general rule the result of intercourse is exhaustion and weakness rather than relief.” Quoting from Arthur Platt’s Oxford translation.

“Exhaustion and weakness” translate ‘*eklusis*’ and ‘*adunamia*.’ It’s not quite the same sentiment, but perhaps served as the source of the later notion---if the sadness was due to the feeling of impotence subsequent to the loss of this precious bodily fluid....” That last phrase in Brian’s contribution will indicate to the initiated that there had been a reference---by yours truly and Alice Radin---to Gen. Ripper of “Dr. Strangelove” fame. Alice also quoted Julius Caesar *De bell. gall.* 6.21 on the Germans’ belief that the later a youth has sex the taller and tougher he will be.

ROBERT KNAPP (early modernist at Reed, not the Berkeley expert on Rmn. Spain) wrote on the FICINO list: “Chadwyck-Healy's PL turns up one hit on the proverb, in Joannes Murmellius and Rodulphus Agricola's commentary on Boethius, Book III, Prose VII:

‘Tristes vero esse Voluptati moerorem succedere cum norunt omnes, tum maxime libidinosi: nam, teste philosopho, omne animal a coitu triste est. Seneca Lucilio: Voluptates praecipue extirpa, inter res vilissimas habe, quae latronum more in hoc nos amplectuntur, ut strangulent. Aristotelis, teste Valerio Maximo, utilissimum est praeceptum, ut voluptates abeuntes consideremus, quas quidem sic ostendendo [Co.. 1014B] minuit; fessas enim poenitentiaeque plenas animis nostris subjicit, quominus cupide repetantur.’

[All, and especially the most lustful, know that sorrow succeeds pleasure, for, according to the philosopher, every animal is sad from copulation. Seneca Lucilius: Extirpate pleasures above all, and keep them among the most base things, which, after the fashion of robbers, embrace us in order to strangle us. Aristotle, according to Valerius Maximus, says that it is a most useful precept that we should consider the pleasures that are gone, which indeed he diminishes by showing them in this way [Co.. 1014B]; for he submits to our souls weary and full of penitence, so that they may not be eagerly repeated.]

But this only takes us to the late 15th century.” [True, but the passage does explicitly attribute the key phrase to Aristotle--- “teste philosopho.”]

- EDWIN RABBIE on the FICINO list made the shortest contribution to the twin threads, but perhaps it is the closest to hitting the bull's- eye: “Latin translation of Ps.-Aristotle, Problems 955 a 23.” In English the translation of this passage would be: “After sexual intercourse most men are rather depressed, but those who emit much waste product with the semen are more cheerful.” I don't have the med. Latin trans. of Aristotle within reach. Also, it will be noted that “Aristotle” was talking specifically about men, not “*omnia animalia*.” But I humbly suspect that this is about as close as we're going to get.

I trust that this replay of one of the list's “greatest hits” will not be deemed unduly salacious.

David Lupher Classics Program Univ. of Puget Sound

Dear David Lupher,

I ran across your summary of a discussion on the history of the phrase “post coitum animal triste” while researching the idea in connection with Otto Weininger's infamous 1906 book, *Sex and Character*. I am not a classics scholar. My interests are primarily the literary and the philosophical significance of sexual difference. I first ran across the phrase in the context of an article on Weininger, Arthur Schnitzler, Freud and *fin de siècle* Vienna by Hans Kohn. The theme, however, I had encountered in literature long before the latin phrase caught my ear. Your discussion recalled for me a passage from my reading many years before, a reference older than any of those you listed. (Before I forget, I greatly

appreciate the leads you compiled.) Here is a quote from Herbert Mason's beautiful translation of the ancient Sumerian epic of Gilgamesh (New American Library, 1972, p. 18)

Enkidu appeared among the animals
And drank with them and rested at their side.
When he awoke he saw a creature
Unlike any he had seen before
Standing near the water, its skin smooth, tan
And hairless except for its head
And between its legs.
He wanted to touch it, but then
It made sounds he had never heard,
Not like the sounds of his friends, the animals,
And he was afraid. The prostitute
Came close to him and the animals withdrew.
She took his hand and guided it
Across her breasts and between her legs
And touched him with her fingers
Gently and bent down and moistened
Him with her lips and then drew him
Slowly to the ground.

When he rose again
Looking for his friends who had gone,
He felt a strange exhaustion,
As if life had left his body.
He felt their absence.
He imagined the gazelles raising the dry dust
Like soft brush floating on the crests of sand
Swiftly changing direction, and the serpents
Asleep at the springs, slipping effortlessly
Into the water, and the wild she-camel
Vanishing into the desert. His friends
Had left him to a vast aloneness
He had never felt before. The lions returned
To the mountains, the water buffalo
To the rivers, the birds to the sky....

[Gilgamesh had been prevailed upon by a hunter's son to send the prostitute to ensnare Enkidu and "make the animals ashamed of him". Enkidu had been too close to them, interfering with the purposes of men by freeing the animals from their traps. His innocence had to be sacrificed. The sadness foreshadows his death later in the tale, which, in turn, alters forever the consciousness of Gilgamesh...

Enkidu now is dying, Gilgamesh at his side, from a wound he got in a struggle with the evil Humbaba (p. 48):]

Everything had life to me, he heard Enkidu murmur,

The sky, the storm, the earth, water, wandering,
The moon and its three children, salt, even my hand
Had life. It's gone. It's gone. I have seen death
As a total stranger sees another person's world,
Or as a freak sees whom the gods created
When they were drunk on too much wine
And had a contest to show off
The greatness of the harm that they could do,
Creating a man with no balls or a woman
Without a womb, a crippled
Or deliberately maimed child
Or old age itself, blind eyes, trembling hands
Contorted in continual pain,
A starving dog too weak to eat,
A doe caught in a trap
Wincing for help,
Or death.
The contest rules the one who makes
The greatest wretchedness wins.
For all of these can never fit
Into the perfect state they made
When they were sober.
These are the things I have witnessed
As a man and weep for now
For they will have no witness if friends die.
I see them so alone and helpless,
Who will be kind to them?

He looked at Gilgamesh, and said:
You will be left alone unable to understand
In a world where nothing lives anymore
As you thought it did.
Nothing like yourself, everything like dead
Clay before the river makes the plants
Burst out along its beds, dead and...
He became bitter in his tone again:
Because of *her*. She made me see
Things as a man, and a man sees death in things.
That is what it is like to be a man. You'll know
When you have lost the strength to see
The way you once did. You'll be alone and wander
Looking for that life that's gone or some
Eternal life you have to find.
He drew closer to his friend's face.
My pain is that my eyes and ears
No longer see and hear the same
As yours do. Your eyes have changed.

It's not like you.
Why am I to die,
You to wander on alone?
Is that the way it is with friends?

Gilgamesh sat hushed as his friends eyes stilled.
In his silence he reached out
To touch the friend whom he had lost.

From my own notes on the theme and its variations (not necessarily the exact phrase):

The epic dates from the second or third millennium B.C.

All the points are covered: after sex sadness and a very literal sense of “all animals” being saddened and alienated. The passage describes Enkidu’s *first* encounter with sex. But the effect is lasting and profound and recurring: “...a man sees death in things.” Before this event Enkidu was more kin to the animals – an intimacy which he lost forever.

Enkidu is the *past* of man. Gilgamesh’s emerging consciousness – and specifically consciousness of *mortality* – foreshadows (*shadows*) what is to happen again and again, interspersed with respites of forgetfulness, of course.

The sadness *may* degrade into *post coitum* resentment, anger, perhaps even violence...

The theme is pretty widespread in modern literature. Weininger is saturated with it. D.H. Lawrence (who reacted to Weininger in his *Study of Thomas Hardy*) contends with it in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*. Arthur Schnitzler, Weininger’s Viennese contemporary and friend of Freud, whose *Die Traumnovelle* was the basis for Kubrick’s recent movie, *Eyes Wide Shut*, was also tainted. It’s not hard to find in Joyce and Kafka (both Weininger readers).

And it has not gone unnoticed by women *as a vulnerability specific to men* (as suggested in some of Justin Glenn’s research). Marguerite Duras laments it in *The Malady of Death* and in a conversation called “Men” in *Practicalities: Marguerite Duras speak to Jerome Beaujour* she notes that the rather dark theme of *The Malady of Death* – male incapacity to love – has been recognized by a surprising number of men... She cites Peter Handke and Maurice Blanchot. Which raises the question what meaning the latin phrase is given in the title of the French movie of a few years ago since the film was written and directed by its female star: Whether she was being ironic or, more interestingly, recasting the phrase in a distinctly feminine role. It likely means something *quite different* when self-referentially used by a woman to the enormous extent the act of sex itself – its definition – describes another world for her.

Victor Muñoz

From: *The Floating Opera*
Annotations by John Clarke

page 37, lines 1 and 24. *ante coitum felix, post coitum felix* — before-sex happiness, after-sex sadness.

“Post Coitum Tristesse”, poem

[David Lunde](#)

Brad Leithauser, [Post Coitum Tristesse](#)

POST-COITUM TRISTESSE: A SONNET
—Brad Leithauser

Why
do
you
sigh,
roar,
fall,
all
for
some
hum-
drum
come
—mm?
Hm...

- > I am a writer who is using Dr. Ernst Grafenberg's 1950 article in the
 - > International Journal of Sexology as a reference. In it Dr. Grafenberg,
 - > who the "G" spot was named after, uses a Latin phrase. It reads:
 - >
 - > Post coitum omne animal triste est.
 - >
 - > The translation he gives is, “The higher the climax the quicker is the
 - > reloading of the sexual potential.” This translation seemed padded to me.
 - > I was hoping, because you are the experts (as demonstrated on your web
 - > page), that you might be able to give a literal translation of this
 - > phrase. If this is an inconvenience, I understand. Any help would be
 - > greatly appreciated.
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From: **Ville et île dans *The Trespasser* de D.H. Lawrence : “Island, My Eye-Land”**

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The Trespasser. Ed. Elisabeth Mansfield. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

La mer est ainsi une femme dont la poitrine se soulève, doucement, à chaque vague [T. 56]. Parce que l'eau est bleu comme les yeux d'Helena [T. 53, 55], parce que la mer est associée, comme Helena, aux fleurs [T. 53, 56], parce qu'en fait tout dans le Solent lui rappelle le corps et la personne d'Helena ("It was so like Helena" [T. 55]), Siegmund, en se donnant à la mer [T. 55], jouit, par avance, du corps de sa maîtresse. Mais la traversée est rapide et la jouissance, par conséquent, de courte durée: "he was in the quay, and the ride was over. Siegmund regretted it." [T. 56.] Surtout si nous retenons l'acception argotique et sexuelle de "ride" [4], l'ancien adage est ici, une fois de plus, illustré: *post coitum omne animal triste*.

[The sea is thus a woman whose breast rises, gently, with each wave [T. 56]. Because the water is blue like Helena's eyes [T. 53, 55], because the sea is associated, like Helena, with flowers [T. 53, 56], because in fact everything in the Solent reminds him of the body and person of Helena ("It was so like Helena" [T. 55]), Siegmund, giving himself to the sea [T. 55], enjoys, in advance, the body of his mistress. But the crossing is quick and the enjoyment, therefore, short-lived: "he was in the quay, and the ride was over. Siegmund regretted it." [T. 56.] Especially if we retain the slang and sexual meaning of "ride"[4], the old adage is here, once again, illustrated: *post coitum omne animal triste*.]

[4] "**Ride**, v. To mount a woman in copulation" [Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* 697.

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Extended writeup for the topic hosted at
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